

House Bill 148
January 18, 2011
Presented by Dave Risley
House Fish, Wildlife & Parks Committee

Mr. Chairman and committee members, I am Dave Risley, Fish and Wildlife Division Administrator of Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP). I am here to provide information in opposition of House Bill 148.

Fish, Wildlife and Parks supports efforts to encourage big game retrieval, however, HB148 is a broad brush approach that will be very problematic in its implementation and we believe may actually impede efforts to improve game retrieval.

The escort system as described creates a complicated system for overseeing motorized access which will increase demands on game wardens and other law enforcement staff. We regularly hear from hunters that they want their recreational rules to be easier to understand and clearer, not complicated with additional rules, regulations and processes. HB148 will also compromise FWP's ability to work with Block Management landowners giving preference to landowners allowing motorized access with rather than those providing better hunting opportunities.

As currently stands, many FWP Block Management areas do allow motorized retrieval and with the express permission of the landowner. Efforts are regularly made to aid hunters on BMAs in their use of areas and often Department personnel assist hunters. One of the building blocks of the Block Management has been working in concert with landowners to provide public hunting while respecting personal property rights to encourage continued participation.

We would also expect that HB148 may increase demand on our TIPMONT hotline. People often utilize this line as a default call to FWP for other reasons. Given the "off hours" that requests for game retrieval will frequently occur, we expect increased demand on this resource. It has only been in the last few years that people have come to understand that the TIPMONT line is not for general information but reporting resource crimes. HB148 may place an additional and unnecessary burden on TIPMONT and exacerbate the substantial call load, which is already exceeding 2,000 calls per year.

It is our belief that our efforts to work with federal and state agencies as well as with Block Management Cooperators would go much farther in resolving this issue locally than mandating motorized access in areas where it may be inappropriate. Thank you.